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ABSTRACT

The views of students with learning and behavior problems about how teachers can help them were investigated. The 40 students had mild disabilities and were in grades kindergarten through grade 12 in resource rooms, content mastery centers, and general education classes. Structured interviews addressed the following questions: What do you enjoy doing at school? What is the hardest thing for you at school? What kinds of things do teachers do that help you? What kinds of things do teachers do that bother you? and What could we do at school to make things easier for you? Student responses are presented for each question. Results indicated that the major impact that teachers make on many students with learning problems is the personal relationship they develop with the student. The teacher who takes time to encourage or the teacher who gets frustrated because a student is slow in completing work has a major impact on how students feel about themselves and about their work in general. It is suggested that if more students with disabilities are educated in inclusive settings, teachers need to be more aware of the way their tone of voice and quality of their interaction with students affects how well students learn and how frustrated they become with the entire educational system. (SW)

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TEACHER TRAITS STUDENTS FIND HELPFUL OR BOTHERSOME: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM

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Teacher Traits Students Find Helpful or Bothersome: Implications for the Inclusive Classroom

While there have been many professionals and a number of parents who have described what they feel would help students most in inclusive settings in general education classes, few studies have directly asked students with learning and behavior problems what kinds of things teachers can do to help them or make things easier for them at school. Nor have many studies asked youth with learning and behavior problems the kinds of things teachers do that distress them or impede their learning. Answers to these questions are especially important as educators discuss and plan educational strategies that focus on the inclusion of all students in the education mainstream.

This presentation presents data from structured interviews with 40 youth with mild disabilities, from kindergarten through twelfth grade, in Resource Rooms, Content Mastery

Centers, and in general education classes. These interviews were conducted by students in a college course taught by the presenter. Among the questions asked were the following:

- What do you enjoy doing at school?
- What is the hardest thing for you at school?
- What kinds of things do teachers do that help you?
- What kinds of things do teachers do that bother you?
- What could we do at school to make things easier for you?

Findings from these interviews are summarized below.

What is the hardest thing for you at school?

Reading	10 students*
Math	9 students
Language	7 students
Paying attention	3 students
Trouble understanding	3 students
Controlling my behavior	2 students
Hating to leave class (for Resource Room)	2 students
Too much work	2 students
Too shy to ask questions	1 student
Speaking and hearing right	1 student
Getting tired and lonely	1 student

What do you enjoy most at school?

Math	10 students*
Physical Education	10 students
Lunchtime activities	8 students
Seeing Friends	8 students
Art	6 students
Computer	3 students
Music	2 students
Class Discussions	1 student
Science	1 student
Reading	1 student
Writing Stories	1 student
Library	1 student

* Some students listed more than one activity for each of the two previous questions.

It is notable that almost an equal number of students liked math the most and found it the most difficult.

What kinds of things do teachers do that help you?

Youth with learning and behavior problems describe as helpful some of the strategies stressed in most special education teacher training problems, but not necessarily stressed in general education teacher programs. Among these

strategies are the following:

- Repeats instructions; explains lessons carefully. - 7 students
- Helps me do math. - 4 students
- Helps me read. - 2 students
- Gives me more time for my work. - 2 students
- Does not rush or embarrass me. - 2
- Can use tape recorders and headphones and computers.
- Reads my tests for me so I can answer orally.
- Uses rewards.
- Sometimes we work in groups so kids can help each other.
- Helps to start with thin books and work way up to thicker books.
- I like Content Mastery: I can use my fingers in there and the others do not laugh.
- I like going to the Content Mastery Center for my tests so I can use the colored [highlighted] books.
- In Resource, they care more and and explain things more clearly.

Youth with disabilities also described as important to them the following, more personal, traits:

- Teacher calls me by name and helps me stay on task.
- Teacher writes down homework so I can remember what to do.
- When having trouble, teacher works one to one.
- Teacher welcomes questions and offers help.
- Teacher talks to me about the future and encourages me.
- Teacher places students who tease me on other side of room from me.

- Teacher helps me get along with other students.

What kinds of things do teachers do that bother you?

Sadly, many of the youth interviewed described teachers who "got mad" or yelled at them. Many other comments related to teachers' not giving them enough time to complete their work. Responses are given below.

- Bothers me when teachers yell. - 5 students responded
- Bothered when teachers get mad. - 3 students
- Yell, especially when I'm trying my best. - 3 students
- Teachers yelling or putting down student for responding incorrectly to question or when asking a question. - 2
- Yell, and do mean things.
- Teachers used to yell at me when I took too long.
- I'm bothered when teachers rush me. - 3 students
- They don't give me enough time when I know the answers.
- Teacher tells me to try when I really am trying. - 2 students
- I'm blamed for things that are not my fault. - 2 students
- Teachers don't explain what they want me to do. - 2 students
- Teachers give directions too quickly. -2 students

There were also a number of comments on teacher strategies that impacted their learning negatively.

- Teachers lecture without writing notes on the board.
- When teachers put "X" [for incorrect] on my paper.
- When they use overheads.
- I wish we all could have math books so we could take them home.
- It bothers me when teachers feel sorry for me.

There were some general complaints:

- We have too much homework. - 2 students
- We have to write too much. - 2 students
- Bothers me to have to remain in seat.
- Teachers have bad attitudes.
- I don't like to be touched.
- We have to read too much.

What kinds of things could we do at school to make your life easier?

Again, many comments related to the use of time, or to strategies they found helpful.

- Thing I need most is more time. - 2 students
- I always get scared when time is almost up and I'm not done with my papers.
- More time to complete assignments. - 2 students
- More time when I know the answers.
- Teachers should spend more time with their students.
- Teachers should give more free time to allow students' brains to "recharge".
- If teachers wouldn't get mad, it would be easier to learn. - 2 students
- Smaller classes with teachers who know how to teach me.
- Give assignments that are sort of easy.
- More teachers.
- More work on computers. - 2 students
- I like to work with partners. - 2
- Use reinforcement and praise for my good points.
- Use calculators in class.

- Use notes and texts during tests.
- I learn lots from field trips.
- Written notes should be provided for students; peer tutors help correct grammatical errors.
- Keep children quiet in class. [auditory processing problem]
- Don't make us copy from the blackboard.
- I wish I could do all assignments orally.
- Help with homework.
- Don't give so much homework. - 2 students
- Assign more homework.
- Teach me math.
- More art. - 2 students

Several students also remarked on the personal qualities of teachers.

- Regular teachers should be more understanding and not underestimate learning disabled students.
- I appreciate it when teachers tell others to leave my wheelchair alone.
- Fire mean teachers.
- Give me nice teachers.
- Teachers shouldn't get mad.

Implications of Findings

It is reassuring to know that students actually find helpful some of the learning strategies we stress in teacher education programs.

Since the use of time came up again and again, special and general educators need to discuss various time options for students with disabilities. These options may include reducing the number of problems assigned;

extending length of time to complete assignment; or having students with disabilities work with non-disabled peers on some assignments. Special incentives may be used for those who have difficulty *starting* a task.

Special and general educators might also discuss when or if it is appropriate to randomly call on an individual student, or if the student should indicate if he or she is ready to respond to teacher questions. They might also discuss how to respond to student's questions. Students might have a specific (non-public) time to ask questions or they might be assigned a peer to answer some of the questions.

In looking at the comments made by students in these interviews as a whole, it is striking that the major impact teachers make on many students with learning problems is the personal relationship they forge with the student. The teacher who takes time to encourage or the teacher who gets frustrated because a student is slow in completing work has a major impact on how students feel about themselves and about their work in general. If more youth with disabilities are educated in inclusive settings, teachers need to be even more aware of the way their tone of voice and the quality of their interaction with students affects how well students learn -- or how frustrated these youth become with the entire educational system.